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ABSTRACT

With up to one quarter of some school systems' teachers being laid off and reduction-in-force notices routinely given to teachers with even 10 to 15 years seniority, obtaining an additional elementary school endorsement is viewed by many secondary school teachers as a prudent step. To determine secondary school teachers' preparedness in teaching elementary level reading, a study was conducted at Saginaw Valley State College, Michigan, as part of a special pilot program for secondary level teachers seeking elementary level endorsement. First, public and private teacher education institutions in the state were surveyed to determine how they were addressing the problem. Then a literature search was conducted for appropriate instruments to evaluate teacher needs, and, finally, 21 secondary teachers who had enrolled in six semester hours of course work in elementary level reading responded to simulations of typical reading situations. Results indicated (1) little consistency throughout the state on the number of courses, the course content, or the student teaching experience needed to satisfy endorsement requirements; (2) lack of standardized measures to assess needs or to generate information on appropriate programs; and (3) secondary school teacher emphasis on a content-centered approach to reading instruction, despite reading experts' current stress on the reading process. (HOD)

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FORMER SECONDARY TEACHERS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: ARE THEY PREPARED TO TEACH READING?

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FORMER SECONDARY TEACHERS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: ARE THEY PREPARED TO TEACH READING?

American education is beset with a multitude of problems and challenges; foremost among these is the issue of teacher quality. Ample evidence exists to substantiate the effects of teacher performance on student achievement. Teacher performance, however, is invariably affected by lay-offs, "bumping," and reassignments which have become the standard response by an increasing number of school districts to declining enrollments and financial shortages.

While reassignment within one's certification is not new, reassignment outside of one's area is a relatively new practice with serious implications. Within these various configurations, it is especially important to note the growing number of secondary teachers who are adding an elementary endorsement to their certificate, thus enabling them to avoid lay-off through reassignment to elementary positions.

With lay-offs in some school systems decimating as many as one-fourth to one-third of the teaching faculty and RIF notices routinely given to teachers with even ten to fifteen years of seniority, obtaining an additional elementary endorsement is increasingly viewed by secondary teachers as a prudent step. Obtaining it in the most expedient manner possible would seem to offer some form of immediate job security.

The reassignment process has given rise to a number of questions especially for reading educators who believe the primary responsibility of the elementary school teacher is to ensure a strong foundation in reading. A major concern, therefore, is the level of preparedness of secondary teachers to teach elementary reading, their understanding of elementary age children, and their orientation to life in the elementary classroom as they displace experienced elementary teachers. Additional concerns center around the responsibility of

teacher education institutions to assist secondary teachers in obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective teachers of elementary reading.

Study

To address these concerns, a study was designed to answer three major questions:

1. How are the teacher education institutions addressing the needs of reassigned teachers, specifically, those secondary teachers seeking elementary endorsement?

2. What information can be obtained from existing evaluation instruments which would aid in assessing the needs of the reassigned secondary teacher?

3. What framework do these teachers use for making decisions about potential situations they will face, specifically, in elementary reading instruction?

The study was conducted at Saginaw Valley State College as part of a special pilot program for secondary teachers who were seeking elementary endorsement.

Proced ures

Educational history has shown that events in Michigan are often the forerunner of similar circumstances which will occur in the other states within 3 to 5 years. In recent years, Michigan has been one of the hardest hit states with virtually no district untouched by the spector of lay-offs and reassignments. Therefore, the public and private teacher education institutions in this state were surveyed to determine the way in which they were addressing the problem of secondary teachers seeking elementary endorsement.

To address the second question, a literature search was conducted for appropriate evaluation instruments. Evaluation instruments can be valuable tools to aid in diagnosing the needs of a group or individual, to determine

patterns of strengths and weaknesses, to ascertain levels of knowledge and to assist in program planning. Specifically, the literature was reviewed to locate instruments which would assess the needs of secondary teachers preparing to teach elementary school reading.

In order to identify the framework used for the decision-making process as posed in question three, 21 secondary teachers, enrolled in six semester hours of course work in elementary reading instruction, responded to simulations of typical elementary reading situations. These simulations required the students to analyze, evaluate and apply strategies to practical teaching situations. These responses were then compared to responses from experienced teachers who were currently teaching in the elementary school. An open-ended questionnaire was also administered to both groups to ascertain perceptions of their needs as elementary teachers.

Results

Wide variation was found in the way in which teacher education institutions address the needs of reassigned teachers. Overall, 58% of the institutions responded to the survey including seven of the eight major state supported colleges and universities responsible for educating the majority of teachers in Michigan.

These responses indicated that with the exception of one small program, none of the teacher education institutions were offering special programs or courses designed specifically to meet the needs of this particular population. Secondary teachers seeking elementary endorsement in most cases simply followed the State requirement of a planned program of 18 hours. The content of the planned program, however, varied widely from institution to institution. For example, some institutions allowed students to take undergraduate courses while at others, graduate courses were required. Some

institutions required more than 18 hours. Some institutions responded that it could take two semesters to obtain an elementary endorsement while others indicated it would take a minimum of two years.

Slightly over one-half of the institutions responded that they required some form of student teaching for obtaining an elementary endorsement. Several, however, indicated that if the secondary teacher had middle school or junior high teaching experience, the elementary student teaching requirement could be waived.

A review of the literature revealed that almost no instruments exist to assess the skills and knowledge of secondary teachers to teach elementary school reading. One which was located was Introduction to Teaching Reading by Educational Testing Services, written for the State of California to test secondary teachers seeking an elementary endorsement. A serious limitation of this test, however, seems to be the very small population on which it has been normed. Additionally, a critique of the test raised doubts as to whether the content tested by this exam is the actual content needed to be an effective elementary teacher.

There is a growing body of research which relates instructional effectiveness in reading to teacher effectiveness. Teacher behavior has a transformational effect on materials and programs. Therefore, it is important to study how teachers make decisions about the behavior they exhibit. In this study, the teachers were asked to make decisions based on simulations of typical reading situations. These decision-making responses were then categorized into three major areas in which an elementary teacher must be competent: content-centered, child-centered, and/or non-reading responses. Content-centered responses were defined as any reference to reading as a subject matter or to the scope and sequence of skills. Child-centered responses were affect-oriented; any responses about self-concept and feelings. Non-reading responses focused on

classroom organization and management as well as developing a working relationship with the principal and parents.

The results indicated that the elementary teachers in this study primarily used child-centered responses in decision-making with some content-centered and non-reading responses. In comparison, the secondary teachers primarily used content-centered responses in decision-making with some non-reading responses but almost no child-centered responses.

An example of this content orientation was apparent during a discussion of the language experience approach when a secondary teacher asked, "But what happens if I don't get a topic sentence when the child is dictating his story to me?" While this fact was not surprising based on their background and expertise, it was disturbing because these teachers were completing endorsement requirements which would enable them then to teach in the elementary school. It should be noted, however, that this program did not include a student teaching requirement which may have had an effect on their responses.

Results from the open-ended questionnaire revealed that secondary teachers had very high non-reading concerns as they contemplated their role as elementary teachers. Much of this concern focused on discipline. In comparison, the experienced elementary teachers had very high child-centered concerns such as helping children learn and enjoy school. Non-reading concerns were next in importance but reflected the need for effective organization and management strategies as opposed to the secondary teachers' orientation to discipline, per se. Content-centered concerns were low.

Both groups were asked about the necessity of a student teaching experience for secondary teachers obtaining elementary endorsement. All of the elementary teachers responded "yes" while only half of the secondary group felt that they would profit from this type of experience.

Both groups were asked to describe their strengths in relation to elementary teaching. All of the secondary teachers cited their content background and their knowledge of "how tough it is in secondary school" as their major strengths. The responses from the elementary teachers on the other hand were all affect-oriented, revealing their concern for developing positive human relationships in the classroom. (See Figure 1)

Conclusions

From this study it appears the teacher education institutions in Michigan are not addressing the needs of secondary teachers seeking elementary endorsement through special programs or courses. Within the state endorsement requirement of 18 hours, little uniformity exists - - whether it be in number of courses, course content or student teaching requirement.

A review of the literature indicates a serious shortage of standardized measures to assess needs and generate information to design appropriate programs for secondary teachers reassigned to elementary classrooms.

The secondary teachers in this study used a content-centered approach to make decisions about elementary reading instruction. Most reading experts view reading as a process rather than a subject matter course. It appears that the primary qualifications for teaching reading at the elementary level are an understanding of child growth and development, self-concept, scope and sequence of skills, and classroom management. This is a departure from most secondary courses which necessitate the mastery of a specific body of content knowledge. During a discussion of the need to meet the wide range of reading levels within any one grade level, a secondary teacher asked in frustration, "Just tell me how to teach fourth grade reading! If I'm told

I have to teach a European History class, I just read a couple of books and then I teach. Now, what book will tell me how to teach fourth grade reading?" Even at the completion of the elementary endorsement requirements, the secondary teachers in this study retained their secondary orientation toward teaching reading in the elementary school. Their understanding of elementary reading instruction reflected a more narrow orientation than the experienced elementary teachers they would be replacing.

Recommendations

Quality of teaching is of paramount importance not only to educators but also to the American public. The results of this study raise doubts as to how the existing endorsement process and reassignment by seniority system efectively guarantees that secondary teachers are adequately prepared to replace experienced elementary teachers. This study is not intended to suggest that secondary teachers are incapable of becoming effective elementary teachers or that they should be prevented from obtaining additional teaching endorsements. Rather, it is intended to raise serious questions as to how well the existing procedures serve the best interests of our educational system, our children, and ultimately, teachers themselves.

Therefore, it is recommended that teacher-education institutions, teacher professional organizations, and state boards of education work co-operatively to develop and implement a more comprehensive and quality-oriented approach to teacher reassignment. Such an approach would be a positive first step in addressing the needs of our nation for quality education.

Figure 1

DESCRIPTIONS OF STRENGTHS

ELEMENTARY	SECONDARY
*PATIENCE	*GOOD CONTENT BACKGROUND
*FLEXIBILITY	*KNOWING WHAT LIES AHEAD AND DESIRE TO PREPARE THEM FOR IT
COMPASSION	TEACHING TECHNIQUES
UNDERSTANDING	SEEING WHAT STUDENTS LACK IN SECONDARY
EMPATHY	KNOWLEDGE OF SUBJECT AREAS
LOVE FOR CHILDREN	DIVERSITY OF EXPERIENCE
SENSE OF HUMOR	KNOWING SECONDARY PROBLEMS
GOOD RAPPORT	UNDERSTANDING END GOAL OR PRODUCT
BELIEF IN CHILDREN	ENJOY CHILDREN
CARING PERSON	DISCIPLINE
ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE	MALE IMAGE
EACH INDIVIDUAL IS IMPORTANT TO ME	ABLE TO ADAPT AND COMMUNICATE
ABILITY TO REACH CHILDREN AT THEIR LEVEL	
RESPECT FOR EACH CHILD	
ABILITY TO GET CHILDREN TO ENJOY SCHOOL	
VARIETY OF METHODS	

*Strength indicated by 100% of respondents.

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